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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: TAIWAN AIRPORT AI EXERCISE

REF: 05 TAIPEI 04951

¶1. SUMMARY. Taiwan conducted an avian influenza (AI) simulation exercise at the main international airport on April 6. The exercise sought to test Taiwan's ability to detect, isolate and treat an inbound passenger infected with AI. The event was broadcast over live TV and Premier Su Tseng-chang presided over the exercise. The exercise was

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conducted on a small scale and showed good interagency coordination but the system has not been tested for a large influx of people. END SUMMARY.

AI CONTROL AT THE AIRPORT

¶2. Taiwan's Department of Health (DOH), its Center for Disease Control (TCDC), together with the Ministry of Transportation and Communications (MOTC) and the Department of the Interior organized an exercise at Taipei's Chiang Kai-shek (CKS) international airport on April 6 to test Taiwan's response to arriving airline passengers carrying the AI virus. DOH Minister Hou Sheng-mou and TCDC Director Steven Kuo conducted the exercise while Premier Su Tseng-chang observed the entire process. The exercise,

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including Premier Su's critique, was broadcast over live TV. In the scenario, the World Health Organization (WHO) has declared a phase 5 alert (human to human transmission confirmed) and Taiwan authorities react by issuing their own AI alert (human to human transmission confirmed).

EMPHASIS ON CONTROL AT THE PORT OF ENTRY

¶3. In the scenario, an hour before arrival, the airplane captain reports that two passengers on board have a fever. The CKS control tower instructs the captain to announce that all arriving passengers must undergo a seven-day isolation period. Taiwan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) notifies overseas offices that travelers arriving in Taiwan from country X must undergo quarantine in Taiwan. The Taiwan Council of Labor Affairs also bans entry of laborers from country X.

¶4. Upon arrival at CKS, all passengers undergo temperature checks before immigration and customs. Those with a fever are given a more detailed exam and sent to the hospital in

Taoyuan (near the airport) for observation. The airport establishes holding stations where passengers free of symptoms, but on the same flight with feverish passengers, are further evaluated. All are sent to quarantine stations for seven days of observation. One passenger tried to smuggle birds; the birds were destroyed and he was taken to district court to face charges. (Observers later questioned why the smuggler was not put into quarantine.)

CRITIQUE

15. Premier Su Tseng-chang provided a critique at the conclusion of the exercise. He said the exercise had gone smoothly but noted that real conditions would be much tougher. He said other ports of entry (air and sea) also need to be ready for AI episodes and he urged the media to distribute information on AI. TCDC will conduct a thorough review of the procedures, regulations, and coordination between agencies before the next exercise takes place.

COMMENT.

16. The exercise was conducted on a small scale so it was relatively easy to handle the small number of people. It remains to be seen how airport and medical authorities will handle large numbers of patients such as what happened during the SARS episode. Medical procedures need to be uniformly applied, AIT noted that not everyone who was checking the passengers was wearing mask and gloves. END COMMENT

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